

The False Cognates in Enology and Gastronomy: a study in English and Spanish

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Abstract

This paper will focus on some aspects of translation based on blending distinct linguistic domains such as the vocabulary of Hotel Industry, of Enology and Gastronomy in Spanish by tertiary level students (2nd year) of the course of Hotel Management.

Portuguese students, most of the times, rely on a L1 (Portuguese) general language, namely using false cognates in the above mentioned areas in the Spanish and English classes in, at a first sight helpful but misleading way, hoping to succeed by using the word that seems correct to the context, when there isn't, because:

- they choose a word suitable to the context in L2, but the choice of that word is often misleading, by relying in a false L1 reality that is going to adulterate reality in the L2 domain,
- but it seems that the opposite is also true, and takes place too;

The difficulty in making such type of distinctions is due to:

- the lack of linguistic and lexical knowledge;
- the need to study the cause of these *chromaticisms*, by:
 - being in touch with specific literature;
 - working, not only with their peers, but also with their language teacher to develop strategies to diminish and, if possible, to eradicate this type of linguistic and, mainly translation problem, that causes so many learning constraints.

Key words: false cognates, Spanish-Portuguese-English, translation difficulties, Gastronomy, Enology

This paper objective is to present the results of several studies that had been made, in the past three years to assess students' ability to use False Cognates (FC) in different lexical domains. These results were based on written tests performed by students belonging to different courses, institutions and using different Foreign Languages (FL). The preliminary study involved second year students of Translation and Administrative Assistance that were having English classes in ISCAP.

The sample consisted of 32 students who had to fill in a test with blank spaces where there were given the correct word and the FC, (for instance, actually/presently; pretended/intended; consultation/appointment, among others) mixed randomly, and they had to choose which was the appropriate word for that specific blank space, according to the context.

These students should already be proficient in English, as its majority was coming from the secondary school with, at least 5 years of teaching/learning to that FL, but it varied from 5 to 9 years. So it was expected that they would not have much difficulty when doing this kind of exercise, as they, for sure, had been exposed to this type of words/terms before.

But that wasn't the real situation. They experienced lots of difficulties in the test filling, and, sometimes, a complete absence of knowledge about the correct word to use. So, when they were asked to fill the blank with the appropriate word, they simply left an empty space. It seemed, at first sight, that it involved both linguistic, lexical as translation problems as well.

It was a very unexpected and awkward situation, as it was supposed they already have been exposed to these words before. So, there might be some reason(s) why they would do this.

To understand more deeply this phenomenon, and to see if this could also occur in other FL or it was something that only happened in English, I decided to make a similar test, but this time, the students involved were exposed to another FL - Spanish. They were the same students that had made the previous test in English, but presently they were assessed, this time, in Spanish. The only difference was that they didn't have neither the same time of exposure to that FL nor the kind of proficiency they were supposed to have in English.

It was the second year they were exposed to Spanish. So their knowledge was incipient, although they benefited from the fact that, in the early stages of its learning, Spanish is

very similar to Portuguese, together with the advantage of sharing a geographic proximity which enables a perception of that language, that, most of the times is acceptable, but not always an accurate one.

My intention was to understand if, when handling with a different FL, the reality could or not change. If there was the same principle of lexical deficit, try to figure out if there could be some underlying learning strategy involved in the two cases.

After analyzing the second sample where the students had to choose the appropriate word and not the FC (for example *anecdota/historia*; *enterado/acordado*; *enfadado/aburrido*, among others) I realized that the strategy seemed to be the same: when they didn't know the correct word, they simply didn't write anything. The only difference was that, this time the number of non occurrences decreased. In other words, the students who didn't risk writing anything were smaller than in the first preliminary study.

The apparent conclusion to be taken was that, perhaps due to the geographic neighborhood, they risked more, in Spanish writing the FC, then they'd do in English, although their knowledge in this foreign language was a better one.

Still, the data gathered didn't convince me if those results and conclusions could be taken for granted.

So, in the third year I made another identical study, this time for the students of Hotel Industry, who had two FL in their course, English (three years) and Spanish (one year).

I restricted the domains and this time, the assessment was not about general English/Spanish, but about two specific areas: Gastronomy and Enology, because these were two of the topics, that studied in their syllabus. The students of both languages, had to fill in a similar test in which there were pairs of words - the correct word to the context and the FC - mixed randomly in Spanish (for instance, *salsa/perejil*; *cosecha/caldo*; *crianza/añejamiento*; *sofreír/freír*; *curar/envejecer*; *trozo/porción*, among others) and in English (*sauce/gravy*; *sauce/parsley*; *vintage/harvest*; *fry/sauté*, *portion/part*; *flambé*; *sprinkle*; *flame /scatter*).

This proved to be even more difficult, because these students experienced much more difficulties, in doing this exercise, than all the others.

So, one of the reasons for this behavior could be the specificity and the lack of knowledge of this particular vocabulary, because of these particular chromaticisms. It was no longer general vocabulary, but terminology pertinent to the two above mentioned particular domains.

I had to establish dependent and independent variables to analyze what seemed to be common and dissimilar in the studies realized so far, to search for conclusions sustained by the literature.

The independent variables were the:

- test type;
- students with more than 5 years of exposure to English;
- students with 2 years of exposure to Spanish; and
- the school year – all the sample belonged to the second year of their respective courses.

The dependent variables were the:

- type of language – general (English and Spanish);
- type of domain (Gastronomy and Enology) – and;
- the courses - Translation and Administrative Assistance (ISCAP), and Hotel Industry (ESEIG);
- and the type of FC encountered.

From the revision of literature made, there were different concepts of FC or False Friends (FF), since there wasn't agreement about the nomenclature for this concept.

In a study made by Silva et alli (2003), where one of the language involved was Portuguese, the use of FC occurs in FL learning when words are closely related both in L1 (Portuguese), L2 (Spanish) or L3 (English) due to the overlapping of linguistic systems that take place during that period.

The literature has studied them, belonging to different research streams, first as being mainly a linguistic problem, namely in specific areas of translation (c.f. Larson and Maillot 1989) referring to cognates with different meaning.

Before this study, Laufer already (1990) had stated that FC should also be studied under the scope of language acquisition, and Lewis (1993) went even further when he sustained that FC were related with the Lexical Approach he defended, being pertinent to vocabulary acquisition.

I personally think that all different streams (translation, linguistic and lexical) should be taken in consideration as they are complementary, depending on the kind of FC encountered.

Students, when learning second language vocabulary or translating, use FC convinced that they are employing the correct concept but, in fact, they aren't, because they rely on a meaning or translation belonging, to a Portuguese reality that is going to adulterate the meaning in the L2 context. So the choice of a word may be not suitable to the context in a L2, or a L3 in both situations, which is going to *push* them indirectly to ambiguity, by making incorrect interpretations, and, consequently, all these erroneous steps are going to lead them to deceiving information as Lerchundi and Moreno (1999) point out.

On the one hand, if we take a look at the Word Reference.com English-Spanish Dictionary the word cognate is translated to *cognado*. But, surprisingly, the opposite Spanish-English definition does not exist at all.

On the other hand, if we look up the expression false friend in a monolingual dictionary we notice that it is nonexistent. But if we look up the two words separately, the adjective false is "something made so as to deceive or mislead", and friend "person whose company, interests and attitudes one finds sympathetic and to whom one is not closely related" which is true when referring to false friends /cognates in a linguistic and translation domain, i. e., words that seem to be closely related to the native meaning in the L2, but that could be (and are effectively) deceiving or misleading.

This is the current explanation, but if we analyze the literature on this subject we find out that there isn't a lot of consistent research (Franco 1998), although it seems to be an area in which students fail frequently (Larson (1989); Laufer (1990); Moss (1992); Lerchundi and Moreno 1999).

Already in the sixties two researchers whose studies were related to Translation Studies, Vinay and Darbelnay (1963), referred this phenomenon as False Friends (FF): it occurred when there were words belonging to different languages shared an etymological or formal correspondence, but due to the evolution within the two languages, by the fact they come from two different civilizations, they have adopted different meanings.

So FF were analyzed merely on the scope of translation within two languages, studied in terms of degree of contamination of interference/transference in a L2, by interference of the L1. At that time it wasn't possible to envisage neither other possible language trinomials, because it was seen merely as a grammar problem, related only to correctness rather vocabulary acquisition or even more with terminology (c.f. Cabré,

1999), where vocabulary overlaps, as it belongs to different semantic fields, with their own specificity and restricted domains and contexts.

So it was necessary to combine besides interlingual factors, derived from the relations established between new words and the already acquired ones in their L1, intralingual features too, phonological, grammatical, and semantic features of each language words. They could be no longer studied separately, due to these emergent areas and consequently lexicons.

According Vinay and Darbelnay (1963) FF can be:

- semantic when they are different in meaning;
- stylistic when they share the same meaning but are separated by semantic differences related to intellectual or affective values, varying according to different environments or cultures (c.f. Silva et alli 2003);
- structural when they possess either lexical or syntactic words whose global meaning is different from its separate constitutive elements

Larson (1989) calls them FC, defining them as words from the L2 very similar to the receptor L1 because they are cognates, but, in reality, they mean something different;

Laufer (1990) creates a taxonomy that incorporates both semantic and phonological features. She distinguishes between:

- cognates which are similar words in form and meaning and
- FC which are similar in form, but distinct in meaning.

This classification presents lots of advantages, because the words whose sound is similar are the closest in terms of lexicon. So, each learned word interacts with others from the lexicon, following phonological and semantic principles. Finally this explains why students learn more easily the words belonging to a second idiom (L2) that are similar to their mother tongue (L1).

Moss (1992) presents another classification:

- FC are similar words in appearance, but they don't derive from a common root ;
- FF are cognates, i.e. words that derive from the same root, but whose meaning has changed differently in L1 and L2.

This last classification of FF is similar to the first presented by Vinay and Darbelnay (op; cit).

In the first collected sample where the pair of languages involved were English-Portuguese it seemed that students relied in Larson's definition of FC, as they thought, for instance, that actually meant *actualmente*, but in fact it didn't at all. The correct word should be presently. So, as they didn't know its meaning, they had two options: either they wrote actually and by doing it they relied on a FC attached to the L1 reality, which proved to be misleading, or they simply didn't write anything, because they were suspicious of the meaning of the FC (actually) and they didn't risk to write a word. So they left a blank space.

When I decide to take the second sample, this time studying another pair of languages Spanish-Portuguese, I realized that they tried to risk a lot more, if the word was a FF, for instance *aburrido* they thought it meant *aborrecido* in their L1 when the correct word should have been *enfadado*.

It seemed that Moss' taxonomy of FF fit better in this particular case.

Finally I decided to undertake another study, narrowing the context – it was no longer general English or Spanish - but specific terminology of two domains they need to master in their future professional career: Gastronomy and Enology. In these particular domains, even in English, the language they were exposed the most in this particular area, they didn't know the difference between the hyperonym (sauce) and the correspondent hyponym (gravy/parsley).

The situation was even worse if the concept belonged to another FL as it is the case of French that appears abundantly in the vocabulary of Gastronomy (for instance *flambé*/sprinkle), difficulties proved to be even greater. The same seemed to happen when we passed from Gastronomy to Enology. The word *crianza* wasn't written at all. So they left a blank space because this term in Portuguese means child. So, there was an immediate lexical reluctance to write something, as for them it was completely out of their assumed and predisposed context. The consequence involved another lexical trap: if they didn't recognize the hyperonym, they even wouldn't establish the correspondent hyponym *caldo* whose meaning in their L1 is a vegetable soup, or a sauce derived from the boiled meat.

The next step was to try to find in the literature a classification that could analyze the types of FF/FC I'd been collecting in my different studies, as at a first sight, depending on the language(s) involved the FF/FC might be different. Or create a new taxonomy based or not in the literature and afterwards to cross data to understand the results.

I'm willing to make another research, which is going to be a complement of the last one I've made, submitting the same students of the course of Hotel Industry to another test but this time, using general English and Spanish, as it was the only students who haven't undertake this test yet, because, with them I've used the opposite methodology: I've begun from the specific FL and now I want to try general FL, to see if there are any changes.

I've already noticed that they use the word groom, but that they don't know that the Spanish equivalent is *mozo*, which they immediately recognize as *moço* in their L1, that could also be a *chico* that performs services at the hotel. In here the L1 perform a facilitator role instead the opposite situation, as we seen before.

The reasons and the conclusions to be taken at this point seem to be of various kinds:

- the exposure to FC/ FF in high school was not a meaningful one, and it appears that they weren't given the correspondent relevance;
- students don't read much, and the absence of exposure to reading causes lack of vocabulary, and with it lack of knowledge that one word may not have that particular meaning in the L2, but presumably more than one, depending on the context given;
- if we look up FF/FC glossaries most of them are Brazilian glossaries in English, because in Portuguese there are only few studies that were devoted to other languages (French and Spanish – (cf. Xatara Oliveira 1995, Franco (1998), Silva et ali. 2003), being the last one only devoted to the issue.

Due to the lack of studies on FF/FC and the inexistence in the domains of Enology and Gastronomy, the teacher role is to explain those specificities even with greater detail in the case of specific domains.

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